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BATMAN™ THE MAXX™

ARKHAM DREAMS

THE LOST YEAR COMPENDIUM

SAM KIETH

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THIS IS HOW I REMEMBER...

the OUTBACK

NOT THE AUSTRALIAN ONE FOUND ON MAPS, THE REAL ONE, THE ONE IN MY MIND.

WIDE OPEN PLAINS, HEART-POUNDING DANGERS, STRANGE SAVAGE BEASTS... I CAN SMELL RET' QUARK'N HUNTING AGAIN, FEEL THE CLEAR AIR, TOUCH EARTH THAT'S MOIST AND FERTILE. I SENSE THE JUNGLE QUEEN'S CREATURES ARE HEALTHY, PLENTIFUL AND FLOURISH.

FOR I AM THE MAXX, AND THIS IS HOW I REMEMBER THE MYSTERIOUS OUTBACK...

BUT SOMETHING'S WRONG.

WHERE THE HELL AM I? SOMETHING'S HAPPENED, THE GOD CLAN PEOPLE ARE UNHAPPY, RET' QUARK'N'S BELLY IS EMPTY.

THE OUTBACK FEELS DIFFERENT, THE SMELL OF BURNT EARTH, WINDY, FOREBODING CLOUDS, DROUGHT AND FAMINE HAUNT THE EMPTY PLAINS.

OUTBACK CREATURES FEED OFF AN AIR WHALE CARCASS, DESPERATE FOR NOURISHMENT.

THE LAND IS BARREN NOW, AND I SENSE THE JUNGLE QUEEN HAS RETREATED INTO HER LAIR.

WHAT CAUSED THIS DARK TOXIC CLOUD TO HAUNT THE OUTBACK?

I WAS IN THE BATMOBILE WHEN MY HEADLIGHTS CAUGHT SIGHT OF GOTHAM CITY'S HOMELESS SWEEP.

PART OF THE MAYOR'S NEW "CLEAN UP THE STREETS" INITIATIVE, WHICH HAS WORKED ITS WAY DOWN TO A COUPLE OF OVERZEALOUS OFFICERS OUTSIDE A SHELTER.

SOUP LINE

NOT THAT THE BULKY GUY IN RAGS BARGING OUT OF THE ALLEY AND RAVING LIKE A LUNATIC IS HELPING MATTERS ANY.

THE OUTBACK IS PLAGUED BY DISEASE, FERAL CREATURES ARE STARVING...!

CALM DOWN THERE, MY FRIEND, WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

I AM... *THE MAXX.*

...NOT WITH THOSE CLAWS IT'S NOT—YOUR NAME'S MORE LIKE "ARMED AND DANGEROUS."

YOU'RE UNDER ARREST.

SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT HERE. THERE'S SOMETHING CURIOUS ABOUT THIS STRANGER.

I'D LIKE TO COME ALONG, OFFICERS.

BUT... WAIT— WHERE AM I? WHERE IS THE OUTBACK?

OUTBACK? THIS GUY REALLY IS OUT TO LUNCH.

EN ROUTE TO COUNTY, THE OFFICERS WERE INSTRUCTED TO BRING "MAXX" TO...

ARKHAM ASYLUM

DR. DISPARU, IS IT? I'M SURPRISED TO FIND THIS HOMELESS MAN TRANSPORTED TO ARKHAM.

THIS PARTICULAR SUBJECT WAS FLAGGED BY THE CIA AS BEING... UNUSUAL... AND POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS.

LET ME ASK YOU, BATMAN, HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF THE "OUTBACK"?

IN AUSTRALIA?

NO. THIS IS A CODE NAME FOR FORGOTTEN OR PRIMAL PARTS OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE.

SO BY "OUTBACK," YOU MEAN THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND?

NO. THE OUTBACK IS *REAL*.

OUR COVERT SURVEILLANCE OF "THE MAXX" SUGGESTS HE MAY BE A PAWN OF VARIOUS ARKHAM VILLAINS WHO ARE USING TELEPATHY TO SNEAK INTO THIS OUTBACK DIMENSION.

TOWARD WHAT END?

TO ESCAPE ARKHAM AND USE THE OUTBACK'S ENERGIES TO WREAK HAVOC IN THE REAL WORLD.

THE OUTBACK IS DYING AND I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN RESCUE THE *JUNGLE QUEEN'S* LAND.

WHO IS THE *JUNGLE QUEEN*?

DAMN. THINKING OUT LOUD AGAIN.

NOT "REAL" AS WE UNDERSTAND IT, BUT THIS "OUTBACK" DOES CONTAIN VITAL INFORMATION BURIED IN CERTAIN PEOPLE'S MINDS.

A SHORT TIME LATER...

FORGIVE MY SUSPICIONS, DOCTOR, BUT WHAT EVIDENCE DO YOU HAVE OF THIS MAXX FELLOW'S INVOLVEMENT?

IT SEEMS QUITE A COINCIDENCE YOU ARE FOCUSED ON THE ONE HOMELESS MAN WHO POLICE APPREHENDED JUST AS I DROVE BY AND HELPED SUBDUE.

THERE IS HIGHLY CLASSIFIED GOVERNMENT INFORMATION THAT UNFORTUNATELY YOU ARE NOT PRIVY TO, BATMAN, AND MY CREDENTIALS ARE ABOVE REPROACH.

TRUST ME, WHAT SEEMS LIKE COINCIDENCE IN THE REAL WORLD ARE INEXTRICABLY INTERWOVEN INTO DREAM WORLDS AND NIGHTMARES, ESPECIALLY OF THOSE IN ARKHAM.

YOU STILL HAVEN'T ANSWERED MY QUESTION.

WHY *THE MAXX*?

THERE. SEE? HE'S UNDER NOW.

LOST IN THE DREAM WORLD... ***THE OUTBACK.***

"BUT WHOSE OUTBACK? HIS OWN? SOMEONE ELSE'S?

"I'M NOT SURE I APPROVE OF YOUR METHODS, DOCTOR."

ENOUGH, BATMAN. YOUR ANNOYING LITTLE QUESTIONS WON'T BE ANSWERED IN THIS DARK LITTLE LABORATORY...

MEANING?

YOU SEE, THE SENSORS CONNECTING AND TRACKING MAXX'S EXPERIENCES AREN'T JUST WIRED INTO HIS SKULL. THERE'S A "NEURO-WIFI" SENSOR THAT ALLOWS ME TO TAP INTO ANYONE'S BRAINWAVE PATTERNS.

WAIT, FEELING WEAK... DIZZY...

DON'T FIGHT IT, BAT-BREATH. YOU'RE SLIPPING DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE TOO, AND WILL SOON BE TRAPPED ALONGSIDE MAXX...

"...IN THE HELLISH, BARREN OUTBACK."

SO... THIS MUST BE THE OUTBACK?

YES, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT. THERE'S THE STENCH OF DEATH SEEPING INTO OUR PORES... CAN YOU FEEL IT?

YES. BUT LISTEN, MAXX, ALL THIS MAY NOT BE REAL, DO YOU REMEMBER THE DOCTOR WHO STRAPPED YOU ONTO THAT TABLE? HIS EXPERIMENT?

YEAH, KINDA. BUT DON'T BE CONFUSED BY THE SHADOWS OF THE OTHER WORLD, GRAY MAN, WITH THE OUTBACK. PAIN AFFECTS US IN WHAT YOU CALL THE REAL WORLD, TOO.

THE OUTBACK'S BURDENS ARE FAR-REACHING AND MORE DEADLY AND OMINOUS, LIKE A DISEASED TREE ROTTING FROM INSIDE OUT.

WHAT'S THE MATTER?

MY CLAW GOT STUCK.

I SWEAR THAT EVIL DOCTOR IS BEHIND IT ALL—WE ONLY HAVE MERE HOURS LEFT UNTIL THE OUTBACK'S AIR SUFFOCATES US AND WILD CREATURES FEAST ON OUR CORPSES.

I KNOW THIS TRUTH, FOR I AM...

THE MAXX

CRACK

JUST PULL IT OUT OF THE GROUND.

OH, YEAH. I FORGOT. THANKS.

NO PROBLEM.

SO, SINCE WE'RE POTENTIALLY IN PERIL HERE IN THIS OUTBACK, REAL OR NOT, LET'S FORMULATE A PLAN OF SURVIVAL—AND EVENTUAL ESCAPE. AN HOUR LEFT IS ALL WE HAVE, SO YOU SAID?

YEAH.

LISTEN, I DON'T SUPPOSE TIME HAS A DIFFERENT RATE OF DECAY HERE IN THE OUTBACK, COMPARED TO THE REGULAR WORLD?

SOMETIMES AN HOUR IN THE REAL WORLD IS LIKE A DAY IN THE OUTBACK.

INTERESTING. WE HAVE SOME POSSIBLE LEEWAY WITH TIME AT LEAST, IF NOT FROM ANY POTENTIAL PREDATORS.

ANYTHING EDIBLE AROUND HERE?

THERE'S CRABBITS.

A *CRABBIT?*

CROSS BETWEEN A CRAB AND A RABBIT.

NATURALLY.

WHAT ARE THE ODDS OF US CATCHING ONE?

CRABBITS ARE TOO SMALL TO FILL OUR TUMMIES. NOT LIKE AN *AIR WHALE.*

AIR WHALE? LET ME GUESS, CROSS BETWEEN A WHALE AND AN—

NO, NO, JUST A WHALE THAT SWIMS ITS WAY THROUGH THE AIR.

OF COURSE.

A WHOLE AIR WHALE IS WAY HARD FOR CREATURES OUR SIZE TO CATCH. MAYBE A DOZEN RET' QUARK'N OF THE GOD PEOPLE MIGHT BRING DOWN A WOUNDED OR BABY AIR WHALE.

THIS MORNING I SAW A DOZEN SPOTTED SEUSSADONS FEEDING ON A DEAD AIR WHALE CARCASS, BUT MOST ALL OF THE SMALLER OUTBACK CREATURES LIKE THE SEUSSADON HAVE DIED OFF.

HEY, GRAY MAN, SHOULDN'T WE BE OFF FIGHTING SOMETHING OR TRYING TO STOP THAT EVIL DOCTOR, INSTEAD OF TALKING ABOUT LUNCH?

GATHERING CLUES, MY FRIEND. INFORMATION CAN BE MORE POTENT THAN AMMUNITION. TELL ME MORE ABOUT THIS DETERIORATING OUTBACK WORLD OF YOURS.

THE OUTBACK IS A MIRROR OF THE ORDINARY WORLD, THEY REFLECT ONE ANOTHER, IN A WAY, EACH WORLD HAS TWO MEANINGS.

SO EVERY CREATURE IN THE OUTBACK... HAS A REAL-WORLD EQUIVALENT?

USUALLY, BUT NOT ALWAYS. IT'S CONFUSING. I DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND IT MYSELF.

THE JUNGLE QUEEN MIGHT KNOW. OR MAYBE ***MR. GONE***. BUT HE'S SOMEONE WE DON'T WANT TO MESS WITH. THANKFULLY THERE'S NO SIGN OF GONE IN THIS OUTBACK.

SO THIS IS NOT *YOUR* OUTBACK?

THE OUTBACK I PROTECT IS THE JUNGLE QUEEN'S, BUT I'M NOT SURE THIS IS HERS. I'VE SENSED AND SEEN SIMILAR CREATURES, BUT IT FEELS DIFFERENT SOMEHOW.

IF IT IS THE QUEEN'S OUTBACK, THEN SHE'S IN BIG TROUBLE IN THE OTHER WORLD. SHE MAY BE SICK OR DYING FOR ALL WE KNOW.

IN THE OTHER WORLD... THE JUNGLE QUEEN IS KNOWN ONLY AS "JULIE."

WELL, THEN, SEEMS LIKE LOCATING THIS QUEEN, WHEREVER SHE IS, IS A LOGICAL PLACE TO START... IN AS MUCH AS LOGIC EVEN APPLIES TO THIS LOOKING GLASS-ESQUE WORLD.

I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT ANY OF THAT MEANS.

IF POSSIBLE, WE'LL FIND YOUR QUEEN.

AGREED. FOR I AM...

THE MAXX. YES, YES, WE ALREADY KNOW.

THE WEATHER IS SHIFTING RAPIDLY, STORMY CLOUDS THEN HOT AND HUMID, CHANGING ALMOST MINUTE BY MINUTE. IS THAT NORMAL FOR THIS WORLD?

I DUNNO. SOMETHING ELSE... I HAVEN'T SEEN A SINGLE ISZ IN THIS OUTBACK.

DARE I ASK, WHAT IS AN ISZ?

DOESN'T MATTER.

IT'S THE JUNGLE QUEEN'S FORTRESS, JUST ON THE HORIZON. BUT WEIRDLY, IT'S FLOATING—JUST OUT OF REACH.

CAREFUL, MAXX, IT MAY BE A TRAP. IT SEEMS IMPLAUSIBLE IT WOULD APPEAR JUST AS WE ARE SEEKING HER OUT.

THE WORD THE QUEEN USES IS "ARCHETYPAL." SOME PRIMAL PLACE TO RECOVER, HEAL FROM TRAUMA. IT'S DRAWING US CLOSER, CAN YOU FEEL IT, GRAY MAN?

I... I DON'T KNOW.

SHE'S IN THERE, I CAN FEEL HER POUNDING HEART... PULLING ME TO HER PRIMAL LAIR.

IS THERE EVEN A CHANCE THIS UNFAMILIAR LAND IS SOMEHOW MY OWN OUTBACK? I'VE HAD MY SHARE OF TRAUMATIC, SECRET CAVES.

MAXX, ASK YOURSELF, DOES THIS FEEL LIKE YOUR JUNGLE QUEEN'S LAIR?

DUNNO. SOMETHING IS CALLING TO ME.

WE MAY AS WELL CRAWL IN AND FIND OUT. YOU COMING?

NOT MUCH CHOICE.

NO, I CAN FEEL IT, ASSUMING I EVEN HAVE ONE—THIS DOES NOT FEEL LIKE MY OUTBACK.

ME EITHER.

YOU HEARD MY THOUGHTS?

NOW YOU'RE TALKING OUT LOUD, HEY, IT MUST BE CATCHING.

HELLO, MAXX. HELLO, STRANGER.

I'M THE *QUEEN OF THIS DEPLETED REALM.*

SO FAMILIAR, YET STRANGE. HER VOICE IS HYPNOTIC AND HAUNTING. HER GAZE SEEMS TO HOLD A DARING SECRET... DARE I GUESS? SURRENDER?

IF THIS IS NOT MY QUEEN, THEN WHAT IS THIS STRANGE LAND I AM TRAPPED WITHIN?

SORRY, BELOVED QUEEN, WE'VE ARRIVED FROM ANOTHER REALM AND HAVE FOUND YOUR WORLD AS YOU DESCRIBE, IS THERE SOME CHANGE OR EVIL WHICH INVADES YOUR KINGDOM?

TELL ME, WHAT OMINOUS CURSE AILS MY BARREN FIELDS?

NOT A CLUE.

I AM THE PURPLE QUEEN, AND I ANOINT YOU, WARRIOR MAXX AND GRAY STRANGER, TO RESCUE AND RECOVER WHATEVER INTERLOPERS AND TRESPASSERS HAVE INVADED MY FAIR LANDS.

THE CLUES TO RESCUE MY WORLD ARE ALREADY WITHIN YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS ARSENAL.

NOW GO.

SUDDENLY...

ARKHAM ASYLUM

YUCK, YUCK, WELL—IF THIS SHAVES A FEW MONTHS OFF MY PAROLE, THEN HOOK ME UP TO THE HOT WIRES, BOYS.

YOU'LL FIND IT RELATIVELY PAINLESS, MR. COBBLEPOT, I CAN ASSURE YOU. JUST BRING HIM THIS WAY, MEN.

I FELT THE STRANGEST SHUDDER, AS IF I'D BEEN THROUGH A WHOLE ORDEAL IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE.

CAN'T SEEM TO RECALL IT NOW, SOME DREAM OR FLASHBACK? BETTER SHAKE IT OFF.

DON'T YOU HAVE ANYTHING BETTER TO DO THAN GAWK AT THE ZOO ANIMALS? *YUCK, YUCK.*

NOW, DON'T WORRY, ***PENGUIN***, I PROMISE YOU WON'T FEEL A...

"...THING!"

ARRGGG, ANOTHER SURREAL JUMP TO THE OUTBACK FROM ARKHAM, BUT WITH NO SIGN OF THE JUNGLE QUEEN.

MAXX SEEMS AFFECTED AS WELL, JUDGING BY HIS SUDDEN WILLINGNESS TO SLICE ME UP.

MAXX, CALM DOWN, I'M YOUR FRIEND.

CRAZY IMAGES IN MY BRAIN—DARK ROOM, WIRES WITH SHOCKS, STRANGE LITTLE MAN IN GLASSES—IT ALL STARTED WHEN YOU APPEARED, THE GRAY STRANGER THE QUEEN WARNED ME ABOUT.

MAXX, STOP IT. CAN'T YOU SEE? IT'S DISPARU, HE'S BLOCKED OUR BRAINS FROM REMEMBERING OUR BEING TRAPPED IN THE PURPLE QUEEN'S OUTBACK.

OH.

PURPLE QUEEN—HOW DARE YOU SPEAK HER PURE NAME WITH YOUR UNWORTHY LIPS. HOW DO YOU EVEN KNOW ABOUT HER?

MAXX, I WAS STANDING RIGHT NEXT TO YOU BOTH.

WHAT'S THAT?

POP
IT'S A DEADLY POISONOUS AIR BLOW FISH.
I TAKE IT THOSE POINTY PROTRUSIONS...
...CARRY THE VENOM?
POP
YEAH, AND MORE KEEP COMING, YIKES!
NOW, THERE'S ONE MAIN TRICK, OTHER THAN AVOIDING THE POINTY POISONOUS QUILLS...
WHAT'S THAT?

...AVOID THE MOUTH.

END CHAPTER ONE

OUR MINDS ARE LINKED, BOUND TO THE STRANGER IN A BLUE CAPE. HOW DID WE GET HERE?

SOMETHING ABOUT A MAD SCIENTIST, CRAZY EXPERIMENTS ON VILLAINS IN THE BASEMENT OF A DILAPIDATED ASYLUM. ONE I MANAGED TO ESCAPE FROM...

...THE JUNGLE QUEEN'S VOICE POUNDING IN MY BRAIN, CALLING ME BACK FROM THIS NIGHTMARE, HER SAFE VOICE, HER SOOTHING EYES, BECKONING ME ONWARDS...

...FOR I AM *THE MAXX*...

...AND THE OUTBACK'S MADNESS IS WHAT I CALL HOME.

CONFUSED AGAIN. WHERE WAS I BEFORE?

SOMETHING... ITCHING ON THE BACK OF MY HEAD.

WAIT, I REMEMBER... THE OUTBACK. SWALLOWED BY THE DEADLY AIR-BLOW-FISH.

I USED MY CLAWS TO ESCAPE...

SLICE

RIP

...BUT *THE BATMAN* USED SOMETHING ELSE.

IT'S A BOOMERANG, BUT IT ALSO CUTS.

WAIT—THE BLOWFISH HAS CHANGED! I REMEMBER THIS GUY'S FACE FROM SOMEWHERE...

ARKHAM ASYLUM.

WHAT THE HELL HAVE YOU DONE TO HIM?

CONTROLLED ELECTRICAL SNAPS ARE STIMULATING HIS BRAIN, INVERTING HIS PSYCHE—UNFORTUNATELY IT DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE VERY... COMFORTABLE FOR HIM.

STOP IT. LOATHSOME AS THE PENGUIN IS, HE DOESN'T DESERVE THIS.

YOU DON'T THINK—

AAARRGGHH!!

NOOOO!

ENOUGH! MUST BREAK *FREE*—MUST *ESCAPE* THIS WORLD!

MAXX, WAIT! RIPPING OUT THOSE ELECTRODES COULD CAUSE PERMANENT DAMAGE.

THIS ISN'T THE OUTBACK I KNOW. THE JUNGLE QUEEN WOULD NEVER—THIS IS ALL WRONG, *ALL WRONG!*

DISPARU, I'M CALLING SECURITY— *NOW!*

ARE YOU INSANE? THESE EXPERIMENTS HAVE GONE OFF THE RAILS!

CALM DOWN. THERE'S A SENSOR PLUGGED IN TO TRACK HIM, AND HE'S STILL LINKED INTO THE OUTBACK, SO NO MATTER WHERE HE GOES, THERE'S NO...

SECURITY'S A SKELETON OF ITS FORMER SELF AFTER HOURS— BUDGETARY CUTS, SADLY.

"...ESCAPE."

"SO WHERE ARE WE NOW?"

"TRAILING BEHIND AN AIR WHALE."

"NO, I MEAN WHAT'S THIS CRAZY JUMPING CREATURE WE'RE TRYING TO HANG ONTO?"

"THIS IS THE DREADED PLOP N' POP. THEY CAN ONLY BE SUBDUED BY FORCEFUL, PROLONGED PHYSICAL CONTACT.

"EITHER THAT, OR A HUG."

"I TAKE IT THIS ONE DOESN'T WANT A HUG? "

PLOP PLOP

PLOP

PLOP

PLOP

"OBVIOUSLY NOT."

WHY DON'T WE JUST LEAVE IT ALONE?

BECAUSE IT DEMANDS PHYSICAL CONTACT. OTHERWISE IT'D RIP OUR SPINES OUT AND EAT OUR ENTRAILS.

TALK ABOUT NEEDY. WHY IS IT CALLED PLOP N' POP?

PLOP!

POP

STUPID QUESTION.

EACH PERSON'S OUTBACK CONTAINS CLUES THAT ONLY THEY CAN BEGIN TO FATHOM.

TROUBLE IS, WE DON'T KNOW WHOSE OUTBACK THIS IS... YET.

THE PENGUIN'S?

MAYBE AT FIRST, BUT NOT ANYMORE.

ARRRRGH— I'M BEING SUCKED INTO SOME KIND OF VORTEX... CAN'T BREATHE...

IT'S THE ***GALL-GALOOP-EEE DIMENSION.***

HERE, I'LL PULL YOU OUT—

AAAARRGGGGAA

OOPS. TOO LATE.

DON'T WORRY, GALL-GALOOP-EEE DIMENSIONS USUALLY EXIT SOMEWHERE ELSE IN THIS OUTBACK. LEAST I THINK THEY DO...

BLIP

BACK AT ARKHAM...

SO, THIS MUST BE THE INFAMOUS *JOKER*.

BRILLIANT DEDUCTION, BALDY.

UECK

SQUECK

SQUECK

I SAW THEM DUMP PENGUIN BACK INTO HIS CELL IN A WHEELBARROW AFTER YOU WERE THROUGH WITH HIM.

DO YOUR BEST, SHRIMP, BETTER MEN THAN YOU HAVE *TRIED* TO BREAK THE CLOWN PRINCE OF CRIME.

YOU'RE ACTUALLY DOING ME A FAVOR. YOU'RE NOT FORCING ME ANYWHERE I HAVEN'T ALREADY EXPLORED.

WHALES SWIMMING THROUGH THE AIR?

A GIANT SLUG?

HOOLY, ANYONE?

CRABBIT GOT YOUR TONGUE, DOCTOR...

...OR DOES SOMEONE JUST NEED...

"...A LITTLE HUG?"

MAXX!

MAXX...?

I COULD BE MILES AWAY, OR IN ANYONE'S OUTBACK BY NOW.

NO AIR WHALE YET.

THAT ODD CREATURE WITH THE SLEDGE HAMMER SEEMS HARMLESS ENOUGH.

SERIOUSLY? THIS IS THE BEST SLEUTHING YOU CAN MUSTER?

JOKER!

IT'S SO NICE AND PEACEFUL HERE, ISN'T IT, BAT-BREATH? BUT APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING.

AND, TO READ YOUR THOUGHTS; NO, RET' QARK'N'S ONE-TON CLUB IS THE OPPOSITE OF HARMLESS.

AS YOUR NEW PAL IN THE PURPLE PAJAMAS CAN ATTEST TO. JUST ASK HIM.

SO DISPARU HAS YOU WIRED UP INTO THIS NIGHTMARISH WORLD, TOO?

OH, I'VE GOT A HEAD START; BEEN TRAVELING HERE FOR YEARS NOW, LONG BEFORE THAT WITCH DOCTOR NOSED IN...

OH, IT'S NOT ALL NIGHTMARES. SOME OF IT'S A REAL YUK, A JOKER'S FLUSH, YOU MIGHT SAY.

...ALL THANKS TO WHAT ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS BAD-BOY-IN-A-BLUE CAPE DID, WITH HIS LOOONG SKINNY HEAD!

HE'S DIALED INTO THIS OUTBACK FREAK SHOW IN WAYS THE REST OF US HAVE NEVER DREAMED. BUT I'M SURE YOUR PURPLE PAJAMA PAL CAN TELL YOU ALL ABOUT HIM.

HIS NAME IS—

I...

DON'T...

...CARE!

WOW, SOMEBODY'S CRANKY.

GUESS POPPING IN AND OUT OF PORTALS HAS SOMEBODY'S GRAY UNDIES ALL IN A BUNCH.

TRY COUNTING TO 10...

...TO PURGE ANY NEGATIVE FEELINGS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN BUILDING UP, 'KAY?

...OTHERWISE, YOU MAY JUST, COME...

...UNDONE!

TURN CRAZY AS A *LOON*.

BATTY AS A BED-BUG.

OR AM I BELABORING THE... *JOKE?*

I CAN FEEL HER HAIR.

SENSE HER PENETRATING GAZE.

MAXX...?

ALMOST HEAR HER VOICE. IN ONE MOMENT, SHE'S JULIE WINTERS.

IT'S SEEMS LIKE AGES SINCE WE LOST CONTACT. HAS IT BEEN... YEARS? DECADES?

I'VE SOUGHT HER ON THE STREETS, IN BACK ALLEYS, SHELTERS, BUT I COULD NEVER TRACK HER DOWN. HER OLD ADDRESS, ABANDONED.

THAT NEW PHONE SHE GAVE ME SEEMED HARMLESS ENOUGH. SHE PROMISED EVERYONE ELSE HAS ONE, ALL THE "THUMB PEOPLE" DO, BUT I... COULD NEVER MAKE IT WORK. WORLD KEEPS PASSING ME BY.

I'VE LET HER DOWN. AGAIN. BUT THAT'S JUST IN ONE WORLD: JULIE'S WORLD.

IN THE OUTBACK, THERE'S STILL HOPE. THERE—IT'S THE WOUNDED QUEEN'S GAZE THAT HAUNTS MY SOUL.

THE JUNGLE QUEEN WHOSE DAMAGED OUTBACK I SEEK TO HEAL, I VOW TO PROTECT, FIGHT TO SAVE.

BUT FIRST, I MUST...

...FIND HER.

HOLD THAT PUNCH, BAT-BRAIN. HERE COMES YOUR PAL IN THE PURPLE PJ'S AGAIN.

KINDA PATHETIC THAT HE HADN'T FOUND US EARLIER, GIVEN HE WASTES SO MUCH OF HIS OWN TIME IN THIS ABORIGINAL FANTASY LAND... OR IS IT ALL IN HIS, AND OUR, HEADS...?

JOKER HAS A POINT: HOW DO WE KNOW IF ANY OF THIS IS REALLY HAPPENING?

HEY, I HEARD THAT.

YOU'RE CAUSING DAMAGE IN WHATEVER DELUSIONAL WORLDS YOU INHABIT.

HEY, I HEARD THAT.

IT'S WORSE THAN THAT—I COULD BE KILLING YOU IN ARKHAM'S BASEMENT RIGHT NOW...

...OR DISTRACTING YOU WITH ALL THIS IN ORDER TO POISON AND KILL THE PRECIOUS JUNGLE QUEEN WHO'S SO PIVOTAL TO THE OUTBACK'S HEALTH.

MARK MY WORDS... NO ONE'S HARMING THE JUNGLE QUEEN, YOU GREEN MEANIE...

...FOR I AM...

...

THE WRATH

MEEP.

ARRG
QUICKLY! HE MUST BE GOING INTO CARDIAC—
NO, YOU FOOL, IT WORKED!
GOADING THAT PURPLE PITBULL INTO STABBING ME LEFT A PSYCHIC TRAIL IN THE OUTBACK, ONE LEADING BACK HERE TO OUR WORLD.
THE JUNGLE QUEEN'S REAL-WORLD COUNTERPART IS RIGHT HERE IN GOTHAM... "JULIE" SOMETHING...
WINTERS. *JULIE WINTERS.* SO HYSTERICAL; THAT'S HIS WEAKNESS.
THANKS TO MAXX'S BLUNDER, I'LL SOON SPREAD A TOXIC TRAIL OVER THE WHOLE CITY.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
IT'S SO FUNNY I COULD *DIE*.
WHUMP
BUT WAIT—
LATER, DOC. I MUST FIND OUR LITTLE MISS WINTERS.
SNAP
SNAP

"SO TELL ME, MAXX, HOW DID YOU FIND ME AFTER I GOT SUCKED INTO THAT DIMENSIONAL WORMHOLE?"

"OUTBACK HOLES USUALLY REOPEN. JUST WAITED A FEW MINUTES, THEN JUMPED IN AND SAW YOU BEATING UP THE SKINNY GREEN ELF."

"HE'S MORE THAN AN ELF. LISTEN, MAXX, WHEN I FIRST CAME INTO THE OUTBACK, YOU AND I FOUND A JUNGLE QUEEN WHO SPOKE OF A SICKNESS IN THIS LAND. JOKER SEEMS TO KNOW ABOUT HER TOO... WHAT ROLE DOES SHE PLAY?"

"THE QUEEN IS LIKE THE AIR WHALES, OR THE SOIL ITSELF. ONCE POISONED, IT CAN SPREAD THROUGH THE LAND LIKE A CANCER. LOOK AROUND, THIS LAND HAS SUFFERED SUCH A LOSS."

"BUT IN OUR WORLD, THERE'S A COUNTERPART TO THIS SUFFERING, RIGHT? DISPARU. THE VILLAINS IN THE BASEMENT?"

"THE OTHER WORLDS ARE LIKE A DREAM, ONCE I'M THERE. EACH ONE HAS ITS OWN RULES, OWN CREATURES."

"WELL, THAT DEADLY GREEN ELF MEANS TO HURT YOUR QUEEN, MAXX...

"...AND I'M AFRAID THAT STABBING HIM THROUGH THE CHEST WON'T STOP HIM."

"I KINDA FIGURED. BUT WE MUST PROTECT THE QUEEN FROM THE POISON...

"...IN BOTH WORLDS."

MAXX, THERE HE IS AGAIN—THE JOKER!

MAXX? WAIT—WHERE ARE YOU?

SKINNY GREEN ELF? WHAT A CHARMING LITTLE WORLD OF MAKE-BELIEVE YOUR PICKLED PAJAMA PAL HAS. *WOW*, THAT'S AN ALLITERATIVE TONGUE TWISTER.

NOTICE MY HANDIWORK YET, BATBOY?

IN THIS WORLD IT'S JUST A TOXIC GREEN BLOB FEEDING OFF THIS POOR LITTLE WHALE'S FIN.

BUT IN THE REAL WORLD?

LIKE MAXX SAID, EACH WORLD HAS ITS OWN RULES, ITS OWN THREATS. LOOK AGAIN, BATMAN, LOOK PAST THE ILLUSIONS.

IF THIS ISN'T REALLY A WHALE, THEN WHAT GREEN METAL CAPSULES THREATEN THE WHOLE CITY OF GOTHAM, *EH?*

TIME TO SWITCH REALITIES AGAIN.

LITTLE KNOWN OUTBACK FACTS.

CRABBIT DROPPINGS ARE OFTEN USED BY INVISIBLE RAMORA FISH, ALLOWING THEM TO CLING TO THE AIR WHALE'S UNDERBELLY UNNOTICED.

LET'S TRY A FEW DOWN ON MY FEET.

GREAT! IT WORKS.

THIS BLIMP IS ARMED WITH BOMBS?

TOXIC GAS, READY TO ENVELOP THE WHOLE SLEEPING CITY.

OR WILL IT TURN INTO A RAINBOW OF COTTON CANDY? ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN IN THIS TOPSY-TURVY REALM!

OKAY—I CAN WALK UPSIDE DOWN NOW, SO EITHER I'M AS INVISIBLE AS A RAMORA FISH, OR NOBODY CARES I'M HERE.

TRUE, I COULD STILL BE IN ARKHAM'S DECREPIT DUNGEON RIGHT NOW...

...BUT IS POISON GAS, POSSIBLY KILLING THOUSANDS, WORTH THAT RISK?

CALL MY BLUFF, THEN. GO ON—I ***DARE*** YOU.

WHOA! THE WIND'S POWERFUL UP HERE... I'VE SLID BACK AWAY FROM THEM AGAIN.

OR MAYBE IT'S THE WHALE WHO'S SLIPPERY. CRAB DUNG ON RAMORA FINS MAY BE OVERRATED.

JOKER, I'M CALLING YOUR SICK BLUFF.

EXCELLENT— YOU'RE AS EASY TO BAIT AS YOUR PAL MAXX!

REAL WORLD.

TOXIC GAS, HERE WE COME.

JUST GOTTA GRAB THE LEVER.

OUTBACK.

THIS AIR WHALE HAS A GROWTH ON ITS FIN, AND IT'S THREATENING TO POLLUTE THE WHOLE OUTBACK.

MUST CRAWL BACK DOWN THERE AGAIN.

JOKER, YOU FOOL, COME HERE.

HEY, NOW, WHAT FUN WOULD THAT BE?

OUTBACK.

CUT CUT CUT CUT CUT CUT

SORRY, MY AIR-WHALE FRIEND, I MUST CUT YOUR FIN FREE TO SAVE THE OUTBACK.

JOKER— COME HERE!

REAL WORLD.

OH, GREAT, YOUR MAROON MORON FRIEND IS CUTTING US BOTH LOOSE NOW.

DIP

THOSE GAS CANISTERS FALLING IN THE BAY IS BETTER THAN THEM EXPLODING OVER THE CITY.

I'VE WOUNDED MY POOR FRIEND, THE AIR WHALE, BUT THE TOXIN HAS FALLEN AWAY.

RIP

BOMB

MAXx

BATS

JOKER

SPLASH

SPLASH

OH, LUCKY ME—YOU KNOW I CAN'T SWIM, RIGHT? KIDDING.

DON'T YOU EVER SHUT UP?

IT'S REALLY *YOU.*

SO, MY OLD FRIEND, WE MEET AGAIN AT LAST.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD. IF THERE'S A REASON THE OUTBACK'S DYING, IT'S GOTTA BE *YOU*.

UNTIL YOU CAN BE SURE WHOSE OUTBACK IT ACTUALLY IS, BE CAREFUL WHOM YOU BLAME. THERE'S MORE AT STAKE HERE THAN A SINGLE OUTBACK, MAXX.

THE AILING QUEEN YOU ENCOUNTERED IN HER FORTRESS MAY HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH JULIE WINTERS. THERE ARE ENDLESS STRANGERS LOST IN A MYRIAD OF OUTBACKS... ALL OVER THE WORLD.

YOU'RE USELESS HERE, AND YOUR ACCUSING ME IS YET ANOTHER BLIND ALLEY. WASTE OF TIME. DEAD END. FIND JULIE. SHE ALONE CAN HELP YOU—

BUT I *CAN'T*... SHE'S GONE, I CAN'T FIND HER ANYMORE. HOW DO I KNOW THIS ISN'T ANOTHER OF YOUR TRICKS?

YOU'RE DOOMED TO REMAIN LOST UNTIL YOU RETURN TO THE SOURCE.

THE OUTBACK'S SUFFERING IS A SYMPTOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S DEEPER PSYCHIC WOUND.

MY HEAD IS POUNDING, MUST ESCAPE.

NO, MAXX. FOR ONCE, IGNORE THE OUTBACK.

FOLLOW THE FORGOTTEN MEMORIES DEEP WITHIN YOURSELF, TOO...

"...YOUR JUNGLE QUEEN'S INNER VOICE."

JULIE!

WELL, I WAS WONDERING WHEN YOU'D SHOW UP.

END CHAPTER TWO

I SIT MOTIONLESS ON THIS ROTTING POG TREE STUMP.

POISED. SWEATY. TIRED YET WIRED.

THE SMELL OF ANTICIPATION HANGS IN THE STEAMY OUTBACK AIR. DANGER LURKS. BUT I AM NOT AFRAID...

...FOR I AM...

THE MAXX

HOWEVER, ON THIS DAY...

...I AM NOT ALONE.

BESIDE ME, ALSO MOTIONLESS, YET POISED TO POUNCE, IS THE DEADLY CANIS LUPUS, OR WUMPUS WOOF.

DESPITE ITS CUTE, FURRY FACE, A DEADLY KILLER. LIKE CERTAIN DINOSAURS, IT ONLY CAN SPOT ITS PREY ONCE THE PREY MOVES!

THUS, DESPITE THE VILLAINOUS WUMPUS WOOF CROUCHED RIGHT BESIDE ME, AS LONG AS I REMAIN QUIET AND MOTIONLESS...

...I AM INVISIBLE.

BUT... WE TWO... ARE NO LONGER ALONE.

I DETECT THE FAINT WHIFF OF... WHAT IS IT?

NOT THE JUNGLE QUEEN. IT'S... SOMEONE, OR SOMETHING ELSE...

IT'S ME, MAXX! DR. DISPARU. CAN YOU HEAR ME?

WHERE ARE WE JUST NOW?

DUNNO. THE OUTBACK, I THINK.

SO, IS THAT YOUR WAY OF AVOIDING THE ELEPHANT IN THE LIVING ROOM?

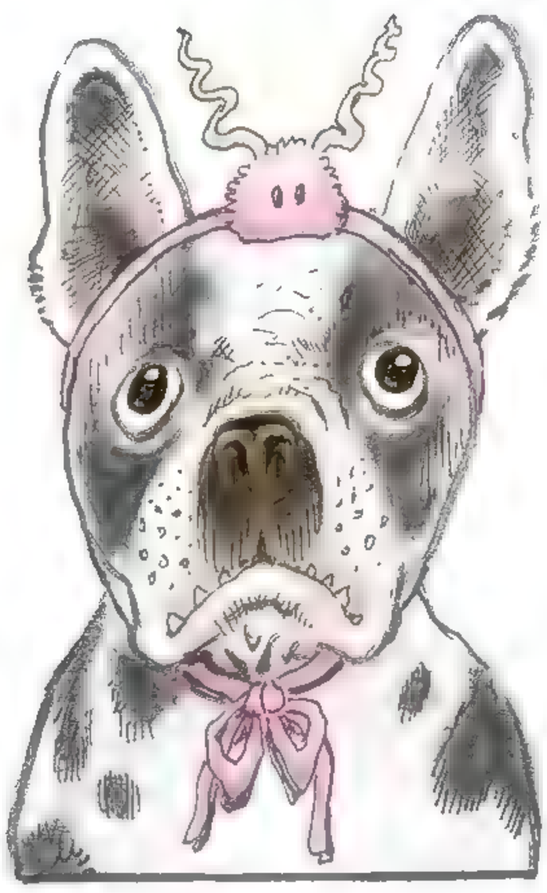
NO, I THINK IT WAS A WUMPUS WOOF.

SHOULD THAT BE CAT? NEVER MIND. BY ELEPHANT, I MEAN THE FACT YOU'VE BEEN AVOIDING ME, OR WORSE—EVEN MORE CONFUSED THAN USUAL, WHICH IS SAYING A LOT, GIVEN HOW CONFUSED YOU USUALLY ARE.

DAMN IT, MAXX, YOU HAD ME SCARED OUT OF MY HEAD. I'VE LOOKED ***EVERYWHERE*** FOR YOU, YOU BIG DUMMY!

YEAH. I MISSED YOU TOO.

UH... IS IT JUST ME, OR IS THAT A SMALL DOG SITTING IN YOUR LIVING ROOM?



JUST DOG-SITTING FOR A NEIGHBOR OVER THE WEEKEND.

OH. THOUGHT I WAS SEEING THINGS AGAIN.

JULIE, ARE YOU MAD AT ME?

NOPE. JUST SCARED, WHICH CREATES VULNERABILITY, WHICH—

—MAKES YOU ANGRY?

SIGH NOT ANGRY, JUST... WORRIED.

WHAT'S ITS NAME?

DOESN'T HAVE ONE YET.

WHAT'S THAT ON ITS HEAD?

I DUNNO. LEFTOVER FROM HALLOWEEN... MAYBE IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE A COSTUME?

HMM. MAYBE THIS IS AS CLOSE AS WE'LL EVER COME TO HAVING A KID.

OKAY, NOW YOU'RE WEIRDING ME OUT.

IT'S A DOG, MAXX, AND BESIDES, I ALREADY HAVE A KID, REMEMBER?

HI, DOGGIE. DOES HE BITE?

SNORT

DON'T WORRY, I THINK YOU CAN TAKE HIM.

GOOD GRIEF, MAXX, HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN...?

I COULDN'T FIND YOUR OLD ADDRESS.

YET HERE WE ARE, IN THE SAME OLD BUILDING.

SPEAKING OF ADDRESSES, YOU NEVER TOLD ME YOU WERE GONNA CHANGE ALLEYS.

MY OLD CARDBOARD BOX'S ROOF GOT WATER DAMAGE.

NEVERTHELESS, IF YOU *DO* DISAPPEAR AGAIN, THIS IS HOW WE'LL KEEP TABS ON EACH OTHER.

YIKES, NOT THOSE THINGS, THEY TURN FOLKS INTO ZOMBIES, ***THUMB PEOPLE!***

IN THE OUTBACK THOSE "PHONES" ARE ACTUALLY LEAVES FROM DYING POG TREES. POISONOUS FIREFLIES ARE DRAWN TO THE BACK OF THE LEAVES, MAKING THEM GLOW.

THAT'S THE OUTBACK. IN THIS WORLD, THESE "LEAVES" ARE A LIFELINE, ESPECIALLY FOR THE HOMELESS, AND THAT MEANS YOU, BUNKY.

WOW, LOOKIE, THEY HAVE ALL SORTS OF STUFF HERE...

SEE? JUST TYPE YOUR TWO FAVORITE THINGS INTO THE SEARCH BAR.

MY FINGERS ARE TOO BIG.

USE YOUR CLAW, SILLY.

OMG... THEY EVEN HAVE A GAME FOR THIS?? *GEE*, JULIE... THIS IS KIND OF ADDICTIVE.

CLICK

TOAST VS PEZ - THE GAME

SEE, NOT ALL TECHNOLOGY... OR, *UH*, "POG LEAVES"... ARE EVIL.

NO, JULIE, IT'S TOO LATE, THIS SMALL LITTLE OUTBACK LEAF HAS ME SPELLBOUND. IT'S TOO LATE, I'VE BECOME ADDICTED TO FIREFLY LIGHT... BECOME ONE OF THE... THUMB PEOPLE.

NO, YOU'VE HELPED MAKE BOTH OUR LIVES A LOT EASIER. GPS SHOULD HELP IF WE LOSE TOUCH AGAIN, AND MY NUMBER'S HERE. I PROMISE I'LL NEVER LEAVE YOU AGAIN, MAXX.

I MISSED YOU.

AWW... THAT'S SWEET. NOW, SHOW ME, RIGHT NOW, HOW TO CALL ME AGAIN IF YOU GET CONFUSED, 'KAY?

grrr.

OKAY, HOW DID I WIND UP BACK HERE AGAIN?

BUT WAIT—A THIRD CREATURE IS SUDDENLY AMONG US.

HE, TOO, IS SIZING US UP.

MAXX! I CAN HEAR YOU, YOU'RE THINKING OUT LOUD AGAIN.

DAMN!

...SO CAN THAT CREATURE STANDING NEXT TO YOU.

WHAT IS THAT THING, BY THE WAY?

THAT IS A WUMPUS WOOF.

IS IT DANGEROUS?

VERY. ESPECIALLY THE HORNS. BUT IT ONLY ATTACKS US IF WE MOVE.

CAN IT HEAR US TALKING?

...I DUNNO. BUT JUST STAY PERFECTLY STILL... SO FAR, SO GOOD.

UH... I JUST REALIZED SOMETHING...

WHAT?

OUR LIPS ARE MOVING.

CRAP.

MAXX, WHAT DID YOU SAY?

DOESN'T MATTER, IT'S TOO LATE NOW.

I LIVE BETWEEN TWO WORLDS, TWO DIFFERENT MEANINGS. THEN I HAD TO SCREW IT UP BY...

BUT WAIT—MY LIPS ARE HIDDEN, BUT SADLY, NOT THE BATMAN'S. IT'S TOO LATE.

GGGRRRRRR

I CAN FEEL THE WUMPUS WOOF IS READY TO POUNCE!

GGGRRRRRRRR

MUST PROTECT JUNGLE QUEEN'S DAMAGED OUTBACK!

CRAP, WHERE DID THE BATMAN GO?

IT'S TOO LATE NOW—I CAN FEEL THE WOOF'S RAZOR-SHARP FANGS DIGGING INTO MY TENDER FLESH—POWER DRAINING FROM MY LIMBS—MAY BLACK OUT NOW—UNLESS I CAN JUST...

CHOMP

MAXX... YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?

...IT WILL STOP AT NOTHING TO KILL THE OUTBACK'S PRECIOUS JUNGLE QUEEN...

GGRRRR GGGRRR.

IT'S JUST A FIVE-POUND DOG, MAXX—

—AND *YOU*—*YOU* NAUGHTY LITTLE POOCH... DON'T BE A BULLY.

HONESTLY— CAN'T YOU TWO BOTH JUST PLAY NICE? OTHERWISE, YOU'LL BOTH BE IN THE DOGHOUSE!

IT IS DONE. THANKS TO THE SWIFT INTERVENTION BY THE GREAT JUNGLE QUEEN, I WAS ABLE TO DEFEAT THE SAVAGE WUMPUS CAT...

I MEAN, WOOF. WUMPUS WOOF.

WHILE IT WORKED, THE BROKEN HORNS OF THE WUMPUS WOOF MAY HAVE LEFT A PSYCHIC TRAIL IN THE OUTBACK, ONE LEADING BACK HERE TO THE OTHER WORLD.

THIS JUNGLE QUEEN'S REAL-WORLD COUNTERPART IS RIGHT HERE TOO... BUT I CAN'T HEAR WHAT SHE'S SAYING.

BATMAN! YOU'VE RETURNED!

I WAS ALWAYS HERE, MAXX. I SEE YOU'VE CONQUERED THE WOLFEN BEAST. WHAT'S THAT IN YOUR HAND?

IT'S A POG LEAF. FIREFLIES SWARM TO THE BACK, EMITTING A WARM LIGHT.

INTERESTING.

OH, GREAT— WHAT DID YOU DO THAT FOR?

CRACK

OOPS. TAPPED THE SCREEN TOO HARD.

WHY DID YOU STAB THE LEAF?

NEVER MIND...

THINGS CHANGE IN BETWEEN THE WORLDS. EACH HAS ITS OWN RULES.

GLOWING LEAVES BECOME METAL BOXES OF LIGHT.

WE'RE WASTING TIME. WE NEED TO STOP ARKHAM'S VILLAINS FROM FURTHER POLLUTING THE OUTBACK.

BUT FIRST, WE NEED TO RULE OUT THAT IT'S YOUR OUTBACK.

JUST FOLLOW THAT GROWING WORMHOLE ON THE HORIZON.

BATMAN'S OUTBACK

"BUT, MAXX, I'M NOT SURE I EVEN HAVE AN OUTBACK.

"EVERYONE HAS AN OUTBACK."

"I CAN'T SHARE IT WITH YOU, MAXX. TOO PAINFUL. PRIVATE. MY SUBCONSCIOUS IS TOO DARK—"

"DON'T WORRY, I CAN'T SEE INTO IT. YOU HAVE TO GO THROUGH IT ALONE.

"YOUR OUTBACK ISN'T JUST A SUBCONSCIOUS JUNK HEAP...

"...IT'S A PLACE OF ESCAPE.

HE'S GONE NOW. I'M ALONE.

EVERYTHING'S DISTORTED HERE. A FEW BRIEF IMAGES FROM CHILDHOOD. WHERE AM I NOW? THERE'S A LITTLE GIRL, SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR.

HELLO, THERE, DO I KNOW YOU?

MAYBE. MY NAME IS ALICE. I THINK I MAY BE LOST. DID YOU FALL DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE TOO?

POSSIBLY. I'M LOOKING FOR A PLACE CALLED... THE OUTBACK.

WHAT'S AN OUTBACK?

I THINK IT'S SOMEPLACE WHERE YOU GO TO ESCAPE... OR TO MAKE SENSE OF THINGS.

IT'S NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO MAKE SENSE OF THIS DOWN HERE, ISN'T IT? I CHASED A TALKING RABBIT WITH A STOPWATCH DOWN THIS HOLE, BUT LOOK WHERE IT GOT ME.

I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN.

IT'S AWFULLY DARK DOWN HERE, TOO, AND YOU LOOK AS LOST AS I AM. MAYBE YOU'VE FORGOTTEN WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A LITTLE BOY AGAIN?

MAYBE IT'S BETTER... NOT TO REMEMBER.

THERE'S A LOT OF WAYS TO BE LOST. I REMEMBER A BOY NAMED BRUCE WHO CARRIED A GREAT PAIN DEEP INSIDE OF HIM. SO DEEP WAS HIS GRIEF THAT HE FOUND A SPIRIT ANIMAL TO PROTECT HIMSELF AND THOSE HE LOVED.

A... BAT, PERHAPS?

YES, HOW DID YOU KNOW?

LUCKY GUESS. SO WHAT DID THIS BOY DO?

WHO CAN SAY? HE VOWED TO MAKE SURE OTHERS WOULD NEVER FEEL THE LOSS HE HAD. TROUBLE WAS HE CREATED A CAVE AROUND HIS HEART TO STAY SAFE AND TO PROTECT HIMSELF.

MAYBE THAT'S A GOOD THING. OR MAYBE HE FELT LIKE HE DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE.

THERE'S ALWAYS A CHOICE.

BUT AT WHAT COST?

I REMEMBER ANOTHER WOMAN, SABINE—SHE DIDN'T KNOW BRUCE DIRECTLY, BUT SHE HAD A JOB NO-ONE WANTED, TAKING CARE OF PEOPLE AT A MENTAL INSTITUTION FOR CRIMINALS, SOME PLACE CALLED ARKHAM.

SHE BUILT A WALL AROUND HER HEART TOO; THE "CAVE" SHE LIVED IN WAS... TO PROTECT HER LITTLE BOY. SHE CONVINCED HERSELF THAT WORKING IN SUCH A HELLISH JOB WAS THE PRICE TO PAY TO PROTECT THOSE SHE LOVED.

MAYBE IT WAS. LOTS OF PEOPLE WORK HORRIBLE JOBS FOR THE GREATER GOOD.

BUT SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, SHE LOST SOMETHING. HER MOTIVES WERE PURE, BUT WAS HER ARKHAM SALARY WORTH THE WALLS SHE BUILT AROUND HER OWN HEART?

SHE TRIED TO QUIT, BUT SHE CRUMPLED UP HER RESIGNATION LETTER.

SHE LOST FAITH IN HERSELF... STOPPED BELIEVING THAT THERE WAS ALWAYS A CHOICE.

THE THIRD PERSON WAS NAMED CALLIE. SHE WAS A BLIND GIRL, ONE WHO HELPED YOU SOLVE A CRIME ONCE, DO YOU REMEMBER?

YES, I REMEMBER.

CALLIE FELT A CONNECTION WITH YOU, ONE SHE TRIED TO HIDE BECAUSE SHE WAS AFRAID YOU MAY NOT RETURN HER AFFECTIONS...

YES, I SENSED THAT ABOUT HER. I TRIED TO KEEP MY DISTANCE FOR THAT VERY REASON, FOCUS ON THE CASE, COLLECT CLUES AND MAKE SENSE OF THE MYSTERY.

WHAT DO ALL THESE STRANGERS HAVE IN COMMON?

SAME AS ME, THEY HIDE THEIR INNER-MOST FEARS DEEP WITHIN THEMSELVES.

Callie

Sabine

BRUCE

ALice

SO, WE'RE HERE NOW.

WHERE'S ALICE?

YOU'RE HOME. THIS IS YOUR OUTBACK.

BUT IT'S PITCH BLACK. I CAN'T SEE A THING.

YES, BUT YOUR SPIRIT ANIMAL CAN.

SO, THIS IS MY OUTBACK, THEN. ALWAYS NIGHT. ALWAYS DARK. ALWAYS COLD. ALL JUST BECAUSE... OF SOME HORRIBLE TRAUMA... TOTALLY OUT OF MY CONTROL?

MAYBE YOU COULDN'T CONTROL IT AS A YOUNG BOY, BUT EVEN AS A GROWN MAN, YOU, SABINE, CALLIE—ALL OF US SHARE ONE MORE THING IN COMMON.

WHAT?

NO ONE IS ALONE.

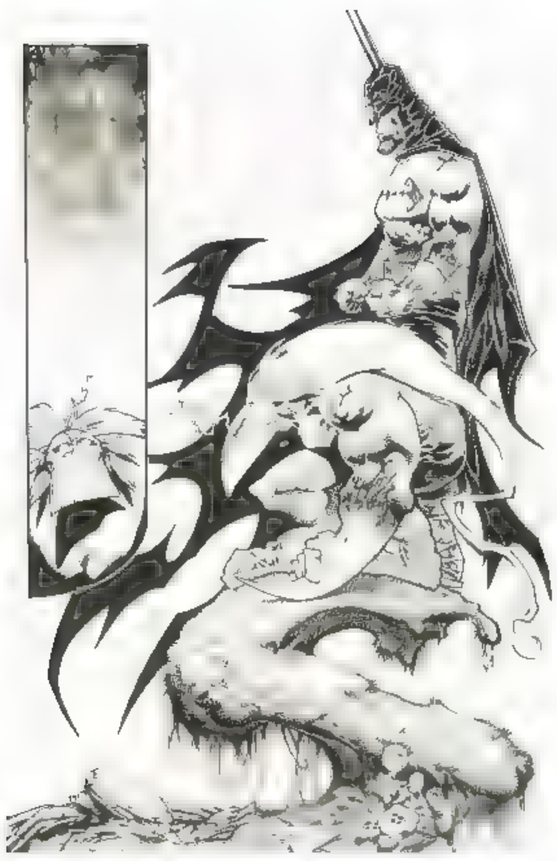
TO BE CONTINUED!

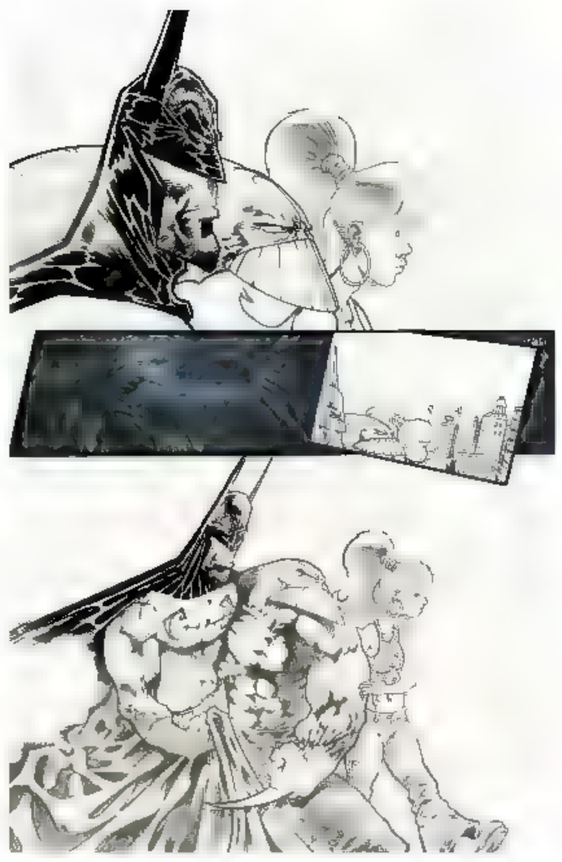
BATMAN

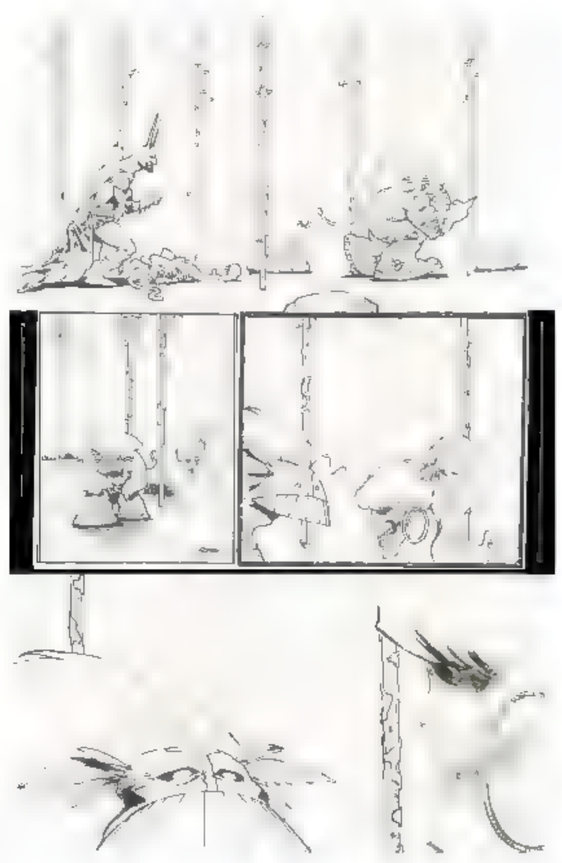
THE MAXX

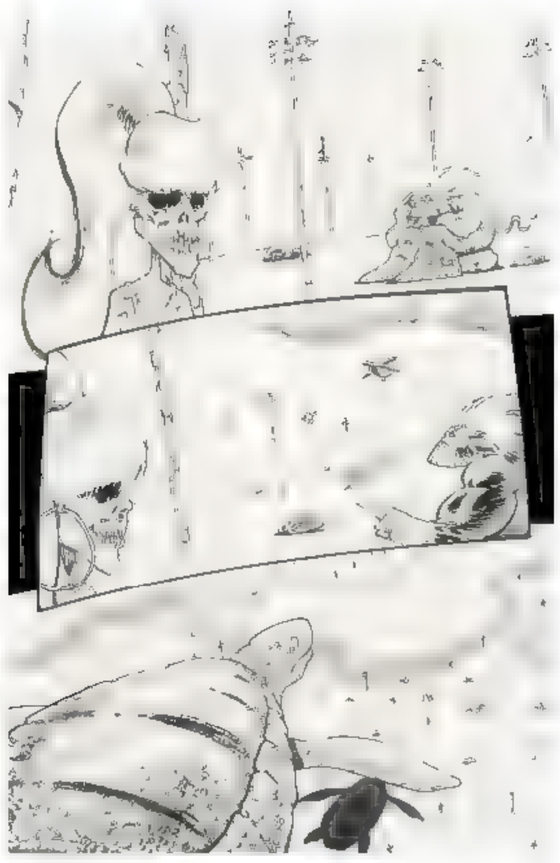
ARKHAM DREAMS

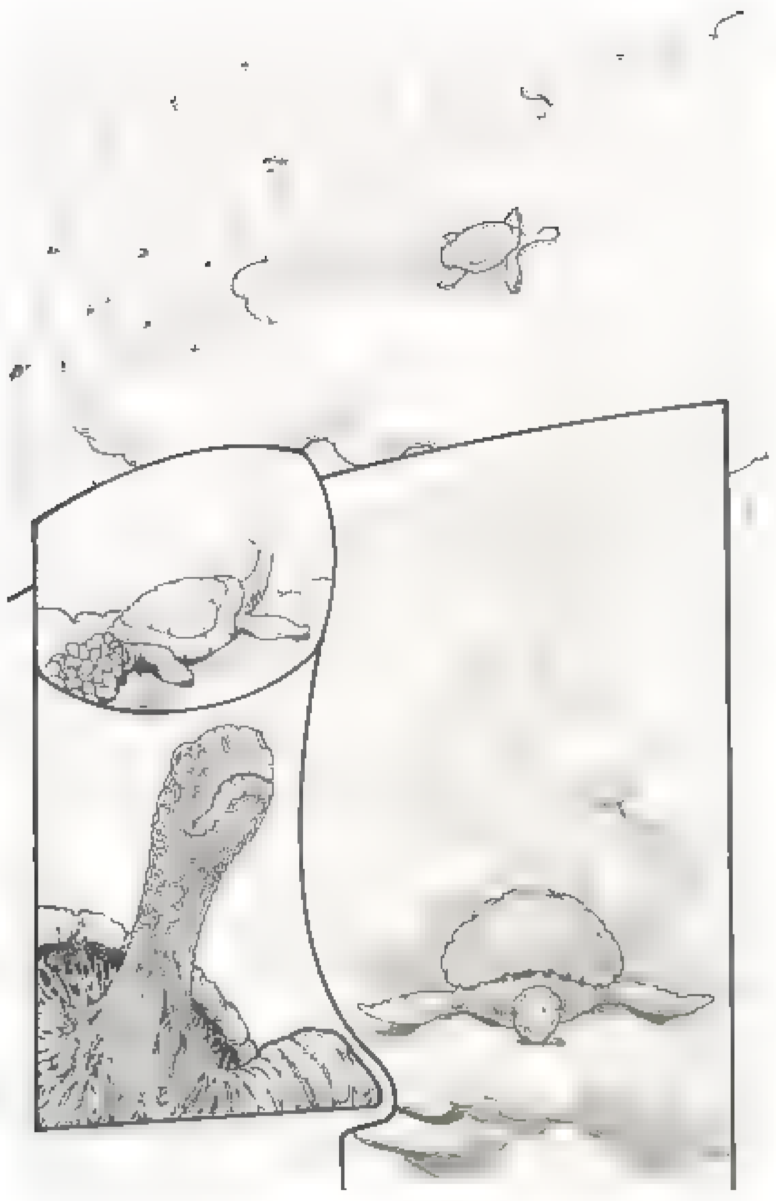
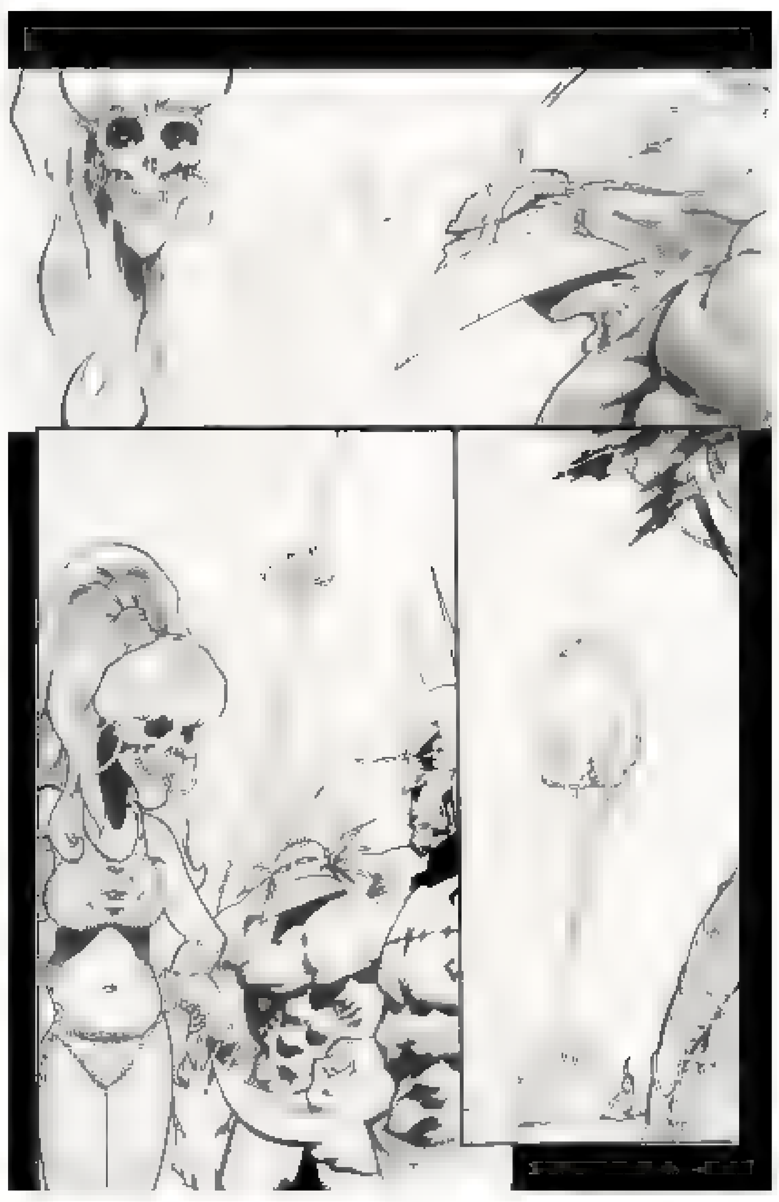
This and the following pages present a preview of the long-awaited final two issues by **Sam Kieth**, both on sale soon!

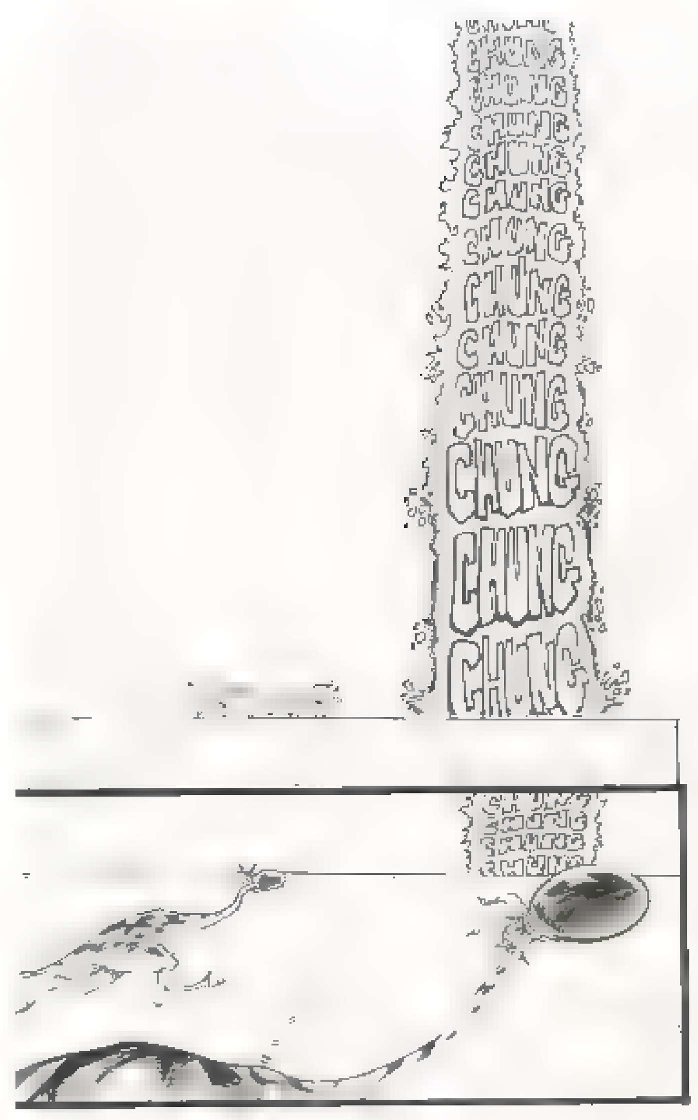






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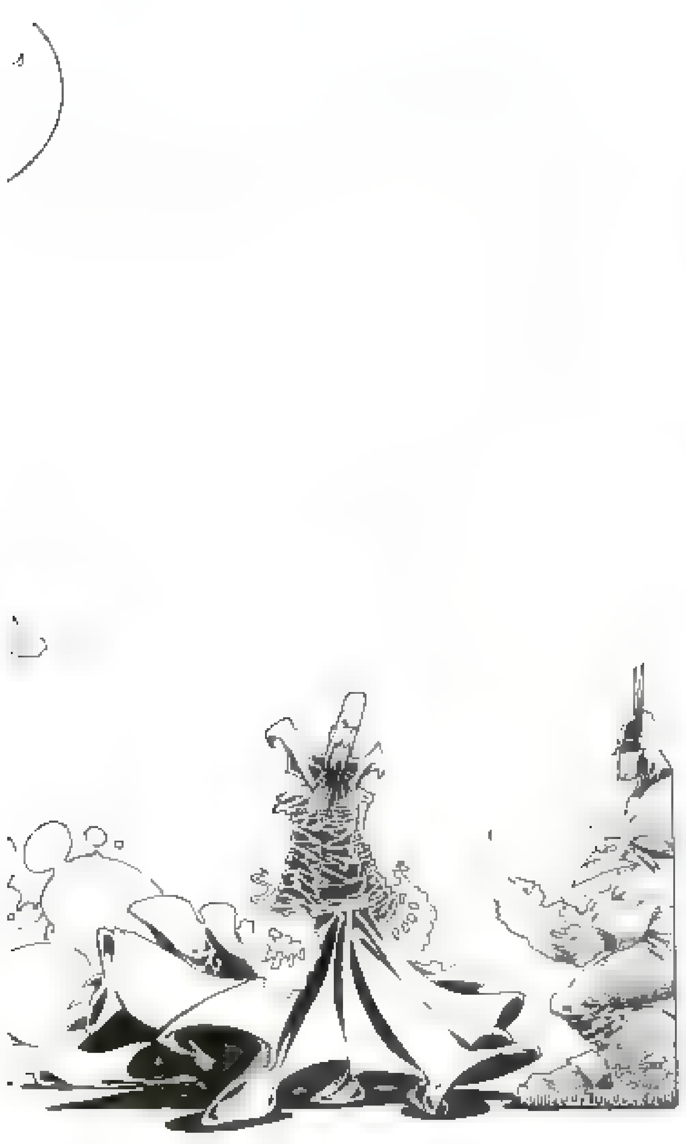

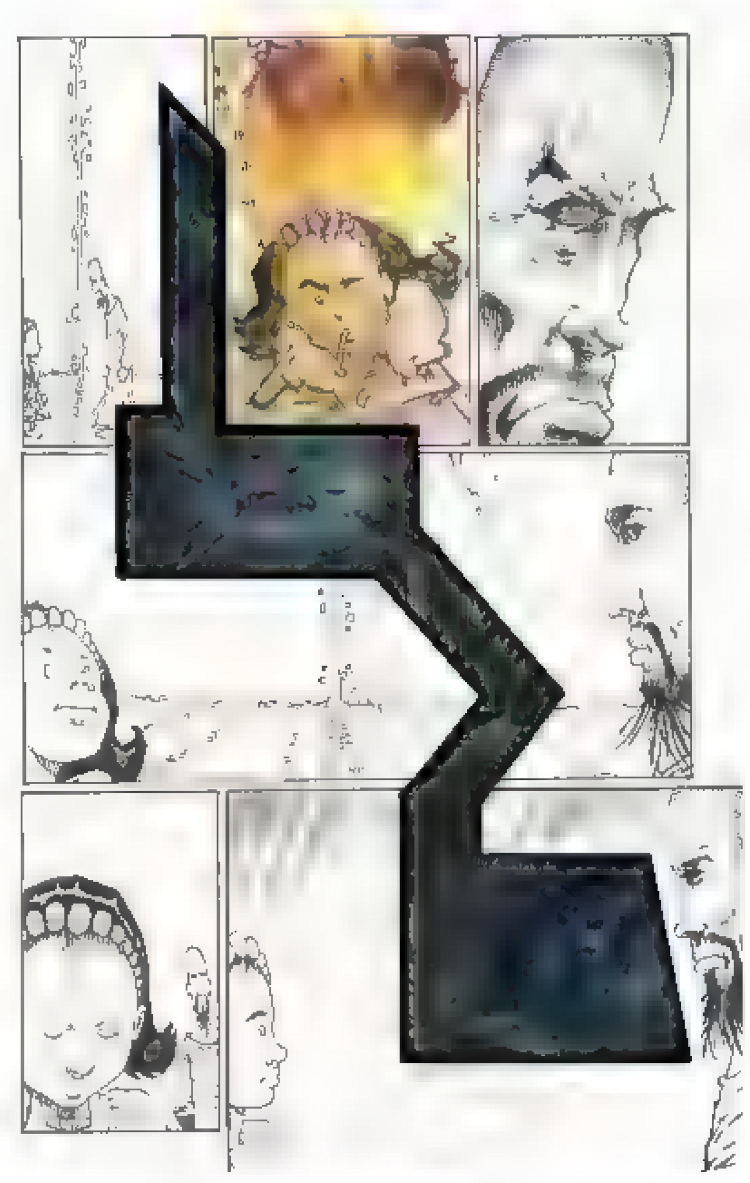

SPLAT
POP

POP
POP
POP

AARGGGG

RRRIP
SNAP
SNAP

PLOP
Dark Queen

AIR TURTLES LAY EGGS IN CLOUDS

THUMP
EGGS FALL TO EARTH

DON'T WEAR THE TINFOIL HAT!
BROKEN EGGS FEED SOIL
GUESS WHO?

The ISE ARE BACK!

REGULAR COVER BY SAM KIETH | COLORS BY RONDA PATTISON

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COLLECTING ISSUES 1–3 OF THE SOLD OUT CROSSOVER EVENT